



Translation and scans by: frillyfujoshidev

<http://ichinichibl.tumblr.com>



Chapter 1

Did you know a cat that lives for a long time becomes a bakeneko? Ask anyone that question and they'll have some memory of it.

"I don't care if I become a bakeneko, because I want to be by your side."

It must have been him who said that, as he stroked fur soft to the touch. Or perhaps he was the one being stroked. His consciousness started to become muddy, like a caterpillar liquefying in its chrysalis before it turns into a butterfly, it was like he had been thrown into a mixer. A serious, but ephemeral young boy with downcast eyes playing with a black cat: that single image came to mind. Just where had he seen that before? Was it because he had wanted to stay by the side of that boy with the lonely eyes that he desperately wished every day,

"I want to become a bakeneko."

No, that wasn't it. He had the memory of looking at a cat lovingly. The black cat that would look right back up at him was so cute.....

His visual memory kept changing. Was he a cat, or was he a boy? As he floated in that hazy space between dream and reality, he heard the sound of someone turning in their sleep and a murmured "ngh..." in his ear.

“.....he moved. He’s alive!”

“Idiot. Of course he’s alive. Kiri-sama told us to tell him when he awoke.”

It seemed like there were small children talking next to him. Young boys. Even though they were noisy, for some reason it was a comforting sound. He was tucked into a soft and comfy futon. It had the smell of freshly washed linen.

Unless they were bullies, he liked children. He could trust them more than adults. When he would wander around as a stray, there were children that would chase him around, but there were also children who would call him over with a *here kitty*, gently pet his head, and give him treats.

“Hey, Akio. He’s probably hungry. You should get him something to eat. How about some of my favorite Nekomata Shrine manjuu? They have some new limited edition taro paste ones now.”

“You’re so stupid, Natsuki. You just want to eat them yourself. First we need to tell Kiri-sama.”

They were talking about something so cute.....he couldn’t help but feel like bursting into laughter. It was safe here—it would be all right to

wake up now. There was no one here to chase him around, or throw stones at him. He opened his eyes, and looked up at the children peeking down at him. This was the first time he experienced being surrounded by human children like this. They were definitely looking at the cat they picked up with wide sparkling eyes.....

“Wah, he’s awake!”

He opened his eyes and the first thing reflected in them was just what he had imagined. There were two human children leaning over the futon with eyes full of curiosity looking toward him. However, he instantly noticed an unusual reality. They weren’t normal children. There were pointed cat ears growing from their heads. There was a brown fluffy-haired boy with pink cheeks excitedly exclaiming, *waah, he’s awake, he’s awake* with a smile, and a boy with black sleek hair with a somewhat mature expression on his face saying, *we need to inform Kiri-sama*. The two of them looked like young masters from a good family with their adorable bow-ties, and shorts held up by suspenders. The room he had been sleeping in was a spacious and beautifully arranged Japanese style room.

“Natsuki, I leave him to you.”

He could see a cat-like tail coming from the back of the shorts of the boy who just left. Well, cat ears and tails were something he was

familiar with, but.....

Maybe he was still dreaming. When he started to blink, the boy called Natsuki turned to him with a soft cotton candy-like smile.

“Just wait a bit. Akio is getting Kiri-sama now, and then he’ll buy the manjuu I asked for. You totally like those, right? They’re a new limited item from the Nekomata Shrine.”

He knew children liked sweets. Things like strawberry short cake with lots of white cream on top, light brown cookies, or fluffy muffins. But, since he was a cat, he hadn’t actually tasted very many of the sweets humans enjoyed so much.

That’s too bad—he thought, then suddenly realized something strange. The boy looked small. The perspective was odd. No matter how old they were, children shouldn’t look smaller than him.....

“Kiri-sama! Hurry!”

Shortly after, the screen door slid open and the boy from earlier—Akio, returned. Behind him, a single man also came into the room. The boys were wearing western style clothes, but the man was dressed in Japanese style clothes. Even though he had the looks of western nobility, his mysterious indigo blue kimono and obi suited him well.

From the looks of his silky chestnut hair brushing against his shoulders and the dim color of his eyes shining blue, he was probably in his mid-twenties in human years. He didn't see any cat ears or tail on this man. From the way the children spoke to him, he must have been the master of this house. As he sat up in the futon, he noticed something even more out of place. Actually, he had been feeling somewhat off from the start, but since he was so shocked by the cat-eared boys he hadn't really thought too much about it. His body was heavy and was wearing a kimono like a human.....

“.....meow.....meooow?”

The first time his voice came out it made him freeze. Why did his meow sound so strange? He was faced with both the man's surprised eyes and the children crying, *he meowed!*, at the same time. At that point he just wanted to disappear. Having a clumsy meow was so unlike a cat. No matter how many times he cried *meow*, *meow* like he normally would, it sounded terrible like a human imitating a cat's cry.

“Why won't he stop meowing?”

When the man approached the futon confused, the children next to him also changed the focus of their gazes with slightly knit brows.

“Was he meowing like this before?”

“No, he started when Kiri-sama showed up.”

When they said that, the man furrowed his brow anxiously.

“It’s my fault? Am I scary?”

“He wasn’t so worked up like this when it was just us.”

“I see.....I guess I am scary.”

When they saw the man’s suddenly troubled expression, one of the cat-eared boys clung to his arm, trying to cheer him up.

“It’s all right. Kiri-sama isn’t scary!”

“He was just surprised, I’m sure of it.”

The other one next to him replied with a cool expression.

No, that’s not it—was what he tried to say, but was unable to get anything out other than even more strange meows. The man seemed to suddenly realize something with a relieved expression.

“Aah, that’s right.”

“Got it. You don’t have to meow. You should be able to speak in words since you’re already in human form.”

Since he pointed it out, he once again looked at his own appearance. He remembered his off feeling from earlier. There was no way he wanted to realize it, so he looked away from reality. *Right*—somehow he had become human. The arms coming out of his kimono sleeves were long and thin, and not covered in smooth fur.

“M-Meow?”



“Like I said, you can talk. You may not understand how since you just changed. Move your mouth. Try to do so like a person.”

The man leaned forward, and supported the corners of his mouth with his hands.

“Say ‘a-i-u-e-o’.”

Kiri said as he guided his lips.

“Ha.....ha-i-u-e-yo.”

The man laughed as if he were teasing him when he somehow managed to push his voice out.

“Try to say it one more time. Remember how humans talk.”

“—a-i-u-e,o.”

“Look, you did it.”

He repeated *a-i-u-e-o*, *a-i-u-e-o* over and over, so he wouldn’t forget the feeling. It was strange to hear his own voice like a human’s.

Sometimes he had thought it would be nice if he could talk with human words, but he never thought it would become a reality.

“What in the world is going on.....?”

His thoughts came out awkwardly from his mouth, but he was so shocked that he was able to speak properly that he let out another small *meow*. The man and the children turned to each other and started to mutter quietly.

“—he’s really cute, isn’t he?”

“Right?”

The two cat-eared boys chimed in harmony.

No, at the very least, I’m a lot older than you two—was what he wanted to say, but there was just so much he didn’t understand that he was unable to interject into the exchange between these puzzling three. There was this unfamiliar Japanese style room, the cat-eared boys with their bow-ties and this handsome man in Japanese style clothing. Just what *was* this grand mystery? A scene had floated into his mind before he woke up—a boy and a black cat. He was probably that black cat. It may not have been the full picture, but it provided a puzzle piece to his current situation which seemed like he had been thrown into a new world all of a sudden. Was this the world after death?

“Could it be that I’m dead.....?”

He asked almost to himself, but the man tilted his head.

“You don’t remember when we met?”

“I’ve—met you before?”

The man before his eyes really stood out due to his looks. He had a feeling that if they had met before, he wouldn’t have forgotten. However, that didn’t apply to him since he had no memory of this man before he woke up.

“Do you remember anything? Your own name?”

“Tou.....? No, Touya—Touya.....”

That was all he was barely able to get out of his mouth, even though it didn’t sound much like cat’s name.

“I see. I’m Kiri. These two are Natsuki and Akio.”

“Nice to meet you.”

“Pleased to meet you.”

Natsuki smiled softly, and Akio next to him respectively bowed his

head. The two of them differed in looks and personality.

“Now then.”

Kiri began to speak a little uneasily.

“About your question from earlier—your *cat* self has died.”

“Meow!”

He had meant to say, *I knew it*, but a meow slipped out. Kiri smiled pleasantly.

“But when I say die, I mean you’ve become a resident of the *Country of Cats*. You went from being a normal cat, to an *ayakashi cat*.”

“An ayakashi cat?”

“A youkai. Cats that live for a long time change. Regular cats have some spiritual energy. That energy accumulates and naturally—change into a case where magic is involved.”

Touya was dumbfounded. He became an ayakashi cat and had now changed into a human form? He remembered—what had happened in his dream before he woke up.

I don't care if I become a bakeneko, because I want to be by your side—that boy he said that to must have been his owner. However, Touya had no memory of his time as a cat. He had a feeling that he had been a stray for a long time though. All alone.....

He wondered if once you become an ayakashi, your memory of being a normal cat starts to become vague.

“The Country of Cats.....is a different world from where I had been living up until now?”

“Yes. It's different from the human world. But, the world of ayakashi and the human world are connected all over. Since there are a lot of ayakashi cats living in this area, it's called the Country of Cats. There are youkai other than cats here too. Also, it's possible for regular ayakashi to freely come and go as they please from the ghostly darkness to the human world.”

This wasn't the place he had been living in up until now. It was clearly beyond his territory—more so, not even the human world, but the world of ayakashi. He had thought the cat-eared children were strange when he saw them, but he still couldn't help being stunned by another world.

“This is Kiri's house? Why am I here?”

“I had just come home when you had fallen in front of my home.”

According to Kiri, when he had propped him up, Touya started to cry pitifully.

“I was crying.....?”

“Yes—you immediately lost consciousness, so I carried you into the house and just let you sleep.”

Touya reflexively touched his own cheek. He could feel traces of tears there. But the feeling was distant.

“.....I don’t remember.”

“That’s not unusual for normal cats that have just turned into ayakashi and become residents of the Country of Cats. There are also many whose memories of their time as cats are vague at first. But they start to remember little by little. You can’t remember anything, even just a little?”

“Nothing.....other than the unusual feeling of this form, I’m not sure how I lived as a cat at all. I have the memory of a boy who seemed to be my owner, but I also get the feeling I had been alone as a stray.”

“—you remember your owner?”

“I don’t really know if he was my owner or not. If I were return to the human world and meet that boy, I may remember.....”

He relied only on the scene that floated into his head before he woke up of a boy playing with a black cat.

“That’s a little difficult.”

Denied so quickly, Touya was at a lost.

“Why? You just said it’s possible to freely go to the human world.”

“—but your ears.”

“My ears?”

“You also have a tail.”

“Huh?”

He replied as he tried to feel around his hips and realized there was a cat’s tail the same as Natsuki and Akio growing there. Well, since he

was a cat, he was used to having a tail, but he had surely thought he had turned into a normal human.

“I can still see your ears. Since you have just changed, you probably aren’t able to control your transformation powers very well yet.”

He handed him a round hand mirror, and Touya was able to timidly look at his whole appearance for the first time. The mirror reflected a boy who looked seventeen or eighteen in human years. Only, different from humans, he had cat ears like Natsuki and Akio growing from his head. He certainly couldn’t go to the human world like this. What surprised him the most though was—his pitch black hair, his ephemeral eyes, and his white skin. His face had the exact same features as the boy playing with the black cat from the dream he had earlier before he woke up. Actually, he was somewhat older than from the dream. The boy from earlier was much younger—he looked at the most twelve or fifteen, like a middle school student. He may have been his owner, and loved him dearly, and ended up with looks similar to his.

Touya was staring intently into the mirror when Natsuki and Akio sneakily turned to each other.

“He’s looking pretty closely.”

“Maybe he’s captivated by his own beauty.”

“I know this, he’s what they call a narcissist, right?”

Watching Touya suddenly pull his face away from the mirror, Kiri’s mouth relaxed into an amused smile.

“It’s all right. You really are a pretty boy by human standards. You were probably pretty as a cat too.”

“No, that’s not it. The reason I was looking so long at the mirror was just.....”

“—your hair is pitch black, how pretty.”

Kiri suddenly reached out and touched Touya’s hair. His mysterious eyes drew closer. His pale brown eyes sometimes shone with a blue light. Even though he wanted to say he was certainly a pretty cat, Kiri had a surprisingly well-featured and handsome face. He hadn’t had much interest in the personal appearances of humans, but somehow, now that he had changed into the form of a human, he could understand it well.

His delicate eyes had a faint seductiveness to them, but even so, that didn’t mean he was feminine. His body wrapped in a kimono looked slim, he was tall and his limbs were long, which gave him a balanced

and proportioned style.

He had a natural elegance. He was a beautiful male. He wondered what was the most ideal balance of good looks for a cat. When he looked at him, the area around his cheeks became hot, it was a feeling he never had as a cat. Kiri stroked his hair then pet him along the base of his ears, which made him reflexively want to purr. Completely entranced, he somehow heard Natsuki and Akio turn to each other again and start talking.

“Looks like it feels good.”

“When you see them next to each other, he really suits Kiri-sama, doesn’t he?”

When he was a cat, he thought nothing of being pet by humans, or mutual contact with another cat, but suddenly feeling like he had done something embarrassing, Touya impulsively pulled his body away. Kiri smiled wryly as he took his hand away then looked at the children.

“—Natsuki, Akio. You shouldn’t be so noisy. Touya just woke up after all.”

“Right.”

The two of them replied in harmony, then lowered their heads.

”Sorry.”

Even though they were precocious, they were well mannered and honest children. Their tails standing straight in apology was cute. He suddenly wondered about Kiri’s relationship with Natsuki and Akio. They seemed to live together in this house, but they didn’t look like his children. They called him *Kiri-sama* so they probably weren’t siblings or related at all. To start with, Kiri here in front of him didn’t have cat ears or a tail, so at the very least, he was human by all appearances. However, putting aside his appearance, he could feel a spiritual energy from him, and knew he *couldn’t* be human. More so than his appearance, his very being had an unseen power.

“Um.....Kiri’s also—a cat, right?”

Touya asked, but Kiri, Natsuki and Akio suddenly looked tense. Silence fell over them. He wondered if he had asked something bad.

“That’s.....”

When Kiri started to speak, Natsuki stood up and opened his mouth.

“Kiri-sama is a cat, but he’s a cat from an ancient and noble blood line

of.....”

“Hey!”

Part way through Natsuki’s speech, Akio next to him covered his mouth.

“Whaaat?”

Kiri smiled faintly as he glanced at Natsuki being held back.

“—I’m a cat.”

“.....I-I see.”

*You have a different aura from these children though, right?—*was what he wanted to say, but he hesitated asking anything else, so Touya ended it with a slight nod. He still didn’t know the world of ayakashi very well. Kiri and the others had kindly looked after him when he passed out, so he’d stop his unnecessary prying.

“Um.....I know now from looking at the mirror that my appearance looks just like the boy who may have been my owner. Though my memory isn’t very clear.”

“You changed into a form that looks just like your owner?”

“I think so.”

His cat self must have loved that boy very much. Basically, all his memories were gone, and he could remember nothing but this boy. He was irritated by his lack of recollection.

“I see.....”

Kiri crossed his arms deep in thought.

“Even though I think you’ll probably start to remember little by little—worst case scenario right now is if you can’t remember anything at all, and fail to transform into an ayakashi, you will return to being just a normal cat. You don’t need to hurry, but that’s just something to be aware of.”

Being told something so frightening, so calmly, made Touya’s face tense.

“Huh.....I’ll go back to being a cat? Didn’t my cat self die?”

“In a sense. But if you are unable to transform into an ayakashi, you’ll return to normal. It would mean you didn’t have enough spiritual energy to become an ayakashi.”

He was unable to grasp the situation he was currently in. In other words, even though he had become a youkai, he was unable to completely conform?

“How long do I have to remember about my previous self before I go back to being a normal cat?”

“It’s different for every cat, but you’ll probably be unable to maintain your human form, and you’ll become more like your cat-self whether you like it or not. I can’t really say for sure, but you should at least make an effort to remember in about a month.”

He needed to remember who he was in a month. In order to do so, he’d have to do just what he had considered earlier, he had to find that boy—the young boy his human form resembled. He figured he was the key.

“How can I go to the human world? Please tell me. And then, tell me how I can change this form.....how to make these cat ears disappear, to look human like you, Kiri.”

“You just woke up, you should get a little rest. You must be hungry too, right? Let’s have something arranged.”

“Hungry.....”

He had forgotten up until now, but as soon as he mentioned it, he felt his hunger all of sudden. Natsuki who had been waiting all this time raised his hand.

“Me, me!”

“Kiri-sama. I’ll go buy some Nekomata Shrine manjuu. They have some yummy ones.”

Akio next to him frowned at his exclamation.

“Kiri-sama, he just wants to eat them himself. Please ask Touya-dono what he would like.”

“Why would you say that? Touya-dono said he wanted to eat them too!”

“Liar.”

“It’s true.”

Natsuki protested as his ears trembled and his eyes got teary. He then turned to Touya.

“It’s true, right?”

“Yes.”

He reflexively nodded with his reply.

“There’s a new limited edition manjuu. We talked about it earlier.....”

“Yeah.”

He answered nodding. Natsuki smiled widely and turned to Akio with his chest puffed out in pride.

“See?”

“Idiot.....”

Kiri laughed as if to calm Akio glaring daggers at Natsuki.

“Akio—go with Natsuki to buy those manjuu. You have my wallet, right?”

“Yes, excuse us.”

Akio quickly stood up and Natsuki immediately followed. Akio gave

Natsuki who was following after him a scolding poke on the forehead. Even though they tottered off like they were fighting, once they opened the sliding door they left hand in hand on good terms. Their skipping footsteps began to fade. Once those two lively boys left, the room suddenly got quiet.

“They’ll be back soon. It’ll only take them about five minutes to get to the Nekomata Shrine.”

“Right.....”

As soon as those cat-eared boys had calmed his anxiety over coming to an unknown world, he suddenly became uneasy again. His anxiety overwhelmed him all at once. It must have shown on his face since Kiri’s expression softened as he once again reached out to pet his head.

“It’ll be all right.”

“I’m sure you’ll remember in no time. I said some ominous things earlier, but a month is just an estimate.....”

“Right.....”

Even though earlier he didn’t think of this as anything but “affection

between cats”, because of what Natsuki and Akio had said, and maybe because he had a human form now, the way Kiri was touching him made him fidgety. He was unable to relax. He wondered if this was also because he had become an ayakashi.....

When Touya lowered his gaze, Kiri tilted his head slightly.

“Am I scary?”

“Huh? No, you’re not scary.”

He shook his head with a puzzled look.

“I see.”

Kiri replied with a glad, but somehow complex look on his face. It was almost as if not finding him scary was unusual. Why was he so worried about whether he was scary or not scary? Come to think of it, the first time he had come into the room, his conversation with Natsuki and Akio also surrounded around whether he was scary or not. What Natsuki had said floated into his mind.

He’s a cat, but not a cat.....

It was possible that Kiri was an extremely terrifying youkai. However, if

that was the case, those cat-eared boys wouldn't be so attached to him.

“You didn't like it when I pet your cat ears earlier?”

“No. It felt nice.”

He felt bad for thinking he might be scary, so he answered straight forwardly. It was true that it made him want to purr. Kiri seemed a little surprised as his eyes opened wide, but then his lips formed into a vaguely mischievous smile.

“Now that the children are gone, why don't we have a little adult talk.”

“Adult talk?”

Was he going to tell him how to go to the human world?

“Yes, let's.”

When Touya leaned forward, Kiri narrowed his eyes bashfully.

“You're being rather forward.”

“I want to know.”

If he couldn't find that out, he wouldn't be able to remember.

“You're pretty curious.....from my perspective, you're also like a child, but.....”

If he wasn't able to talk about the human world in front of children— then he figured he would talk to him about the world of ayakashi. However, after Kiri stared at Touya for a while deep in thought, he slowly brought himself nearer to him without a word. He drew his face closer as he pet his hair. Before he could even think, *huuuuh*, his forehead was kissed gently. He gasped at its suddenness, but Kiri just once again looked at him from close-range as his lips spread into a coquettish smile. He shouldn't be attracted to this charming man because he was also male, but.....

He figured since they were both cats looking each other in the eyes intensely like this, it would provoke a fight, but for some reason with Kiri he didn't feel that way. Though it was possible that it was because he knew his opponent had an overwhelming power. Still in a daze, his cat ear was licked, and his body shook in surprise. He guessed that he intended on grooming him for some reason, but it felt a little different from when he was a regular cat, and confused him. Mutual grooming between cats was a sign of deep affection. Being licked along the grain of his fur felt nice like when he was a cat, but now, he felt a strange heat whirl up in his body like he had never felt before—.

“Wa.....wait.”

Touya reacted unexpectedly, pushing Kiri's body away in a panic. He felt a burning heat from the neck up.

“What?”

“Please wait. My face feels weird.....”

When he picked up the hand mirror from the tatami mat to check his face, it was deep red. This was the first time he learned a human's furless skin turned red during a situation like this.

“.....amazing. When you're being groomed with a human body, your face turns red, huh. A hairless body is *that* different.”

“_____”

Kiri kept quiet for a moment before muttering under his breath.

“Groomed.....?”

“You weren't grooming?”



Touya asked with a confused look, Kiri then burst into amused laughter. Unsure why he was laughing, Touya tilted his head with a puzzled look.

“.....it’s nothing, you’re just not used to it yet, so next time I’ll go slow. Natsuki and Akio should be coming back soon.”

“Yeah.”

He nodded honestly. Kiri laughed cheerfully as if something was funny about that. Being laughed at this much, he started to feel like it wasn’t all that funny. Since he was a cat, he should be used to being groomed. He knew it was a way to communicate. Still, in this form, it raised feelings different from a cat.

“You really aren’t scared of me, are you?”

Touya thought it was strange that Kiri asked him that.

Scared of you—? Why?

He was thankful to the one who helped him when he had been thrown into a completely unknown world and passed out, there was no way he could be scared of him. Now that he thought about it, even though Kiri had shown him proper affection by touching him like that earlier, he realized he hadn’t touched him back. He figured he should extend a

greeting to the one who let him into his home. On top of that, he wanted him to teach him various things, so if he didn't step up, it would be bad manners.

“—Kiri.”

For now, Touya took Kiri's hand and squeezed it tightly. He had a feeling that rubbing his scent with his nose onto his body like a cat would as a greeting would be strange in a human form. He didn't know what the correct greeting was for an *ayakashi cat*. Kiri's eyes were open wide, but at the very least, he didn't try to pull his hand away. Kiri stared at Touya's face and reciprocated his fingertips. Since his eyes narrowed seemingly happy, he didn't appear to hate it.

“What? Why are you holding my hand?”

“I'm, uh.....thankful to you, Kiri. I wanted you to know that. I had to tell you somehow.....”

“I see.”

Kiri smiled cheerfully as if something was funny.

“Now then.....as for what we were talking about earlier, I'd like you to tell me. I'd like to learn how to change my form so I can go to the

human world.”

“You look like a cute young boy to me right now.”

“No, I mean, my ears.”

Touya reached for the cat ears on his head and pulled at them.

“First of all.....I need to do something about these, or I won’t be able to go to the human world. How can I get them to sink down?”

“_____“

Kiri looked at Touya’s face deep in thought about something, but eventually slowly shook his head.

“No, you’re fine this way. It’d be such a waste.”

“A waste? I don’t really want to forget about my cat self, but.....won’t I stand out? I’ve never seen a human that looked like this.”

“There are people who have an interest in wearing those sort of things.”

“Really?”

He would have been surprised to see a human with cat ears like Natsuki and Akio, but he may have just been ignorant to those sort of things. Even as his cat self he didn't know much about human hobbies and interests.

“—it suits you.”

“Huh?”

When Touya tilted his head, Kiri cleared his throat.

“Nothing...”

“Since this is the Country of Cats, it's not strange at all to see people who look like you. There are a lot of people who stay in their half-human, half-beast form. Akio and Natsuki do too, right? Aren't those two super cute? You don't like having cat ears?”

Kiri said as if he thought he was denying Natsuki and Akio as he turned his questioning gaze toward Touya. He wasn't sure how to reply. Of course he didn't hate them (he was originally a cat after all) and Natsuki and Akio were certainly cute.

“That may be so for the children, but it's so I can go to the human world.....”

“You can’t go to the human world as you are now. You probably have no idea what’s going on, but for now, you should at least know a little about the world of ayakashi. When you do, your spiritual powers will stabilize, and you’ll be able to transform into your human form, half-beast form, and even cat form at will. Until then, all you can do is get used to everything.”

Even if he told him to get used to everything, this was a situation where he had suddenly lost his memories, and thrown into an unknown world. Having no idea what he should do, he was currently at a loss.

“—you should stay in this house. Natsuki and Akio would be happy too.”

Kiri proposed unexpectedly. However, he honestly didn’t have any other leads, so he would be thankful if he could stay here.

“Huh.....it’s all right?”

“I don’t mind. If it’s all right with you. You should learn how different you are from your time as a regular cat. It’s dangerous for you now, so I couldn’t even send you on an errand to the Nekomata Shrine.”

He felt a little uncomfortable being treated more like a child than Natsuki and Akio. But it was true that he had no idea what was going on.....

“If I was told the way, I think I could go do the shopping at least.....”

“You’ll be catnapped.”

“Um, Kiri—I’m not that young. This form is human high school or college aged, but as a cat I was a much older adult.....”

“I’m not treating you like a child. If I was, I wouldn’t have done those things earlier. Didn’t I say we were having an *adult conversation*? But, your current state is that of an undeveloped cat.”

“Undeveloped cat?”

“—I’ll tell you eventually. You’ll understand when you’re used to this world a little more.”

It seemed to be difficult to explain somehow, so Kiri’s words became vague.

“How old are you, Kiri? Since you’re a youkai, you must have lived for a long time.....”

“—I’m.....”

He stopped his words midway with a smile on his face that seemed to

have *don't ask me that* written across it as he avoided the question.

“Instead of worrying about me, you need to know about yourself first. For instance, you probably shouldn't grab the hand of man you don't know like you did earlier, outside of here.”

What he intended as an amicable gesture appeared to result in a complicated issue in his human form. *But didn't you pet my head and lick my ear just now, Kiri*—was what he wanted to say, but he didn't have any confidence as to what was right or wrong. The three sensations blending inside of himself—the cat, the human, and the ayakashi sometimes confused him.

“Were you upset that I held your hand earlier, Kiri?”

“Of course not, you can touch my hands as much as you like.”

Kiri said with a teasing look in his eyes.

“See?”

He asked as he grabbed Touya's hand this time.

“Touch them—“

Even though he had done the same thing earlier, having it done to him by someone else made him feel awkward. He was starting to think the way human feelings changed so much was troublesome. If he were in his cat form, he wouldn't feel a thing having his face licked or his whole body nuzzled against by another cat, let alone his hand. In his changed consciousness, Kiri's gaze toward him was unusually sweet.

Sweet?

He shouldn't know that sort of sensation as a cat.

“Um.....Kiri.....”

The moment their eyes met, he heard noisy footsteps from behind the screen door. He also heard voices being exchanged.

“Hey, don't run, Natsuki.”

“I'm not running.”

“Kiri-sama, we're ba.....”

“Meow!”

Touya stopped his movements with a cry when Natsuki and Akio

opened the screen door and looked inside the room. They had seen Touya and Kiri in close proximity just as they were holding hands. Natsuki and Akio turned red for some reason as they looked at each other with a look that seemed to say, *what would we do?* Feeling as though they were misunderstanding the mood, Touya frantically pulled his hand away.

“Kiri-sama, excuse us. Sorry for the intrusion. We were able to buy the manjuu without any problems. We’ll make the tea now.”

Akio’s expression immediately tensed as he pulled away Natsuki who was watching them with eyes full of curiosity.

“Hey, don’t stare. Let’s go.”

Once the screen door closed, he could hear the two of them talking as they walked down the hall.

“Hey, hey, what were Kiri-sama and Touya-dono doing?”

“Idiot, be quiet. Don’t interfere with their adult time together.”

“Were they mating?”

“Idiot.”

“Waaahn!”

He heard the sound of a head being bonked and Natsuki crying out.

Mating?

Perhaps he had misheard him, but.....Touya’s mouth twitched as expected. His cat, human and ayakashi sensations—all three had become mixed together, but no matter how much he couldn’t understand about his current situation, he knew two males could not mate together. Unless it was different in the world of ayakashi.

When he hesitantly looked at Kiri, he couldn’t tell if he heard Natsuki and Akio’s exchange by his unconcerned face that looked as if nothing had happened. When their eyes met, he replied with a *hm*, and a mischievous expression. Eventually Natsuki and Akio returned with tea and the manjuus in their hands.

“Here you go.”

Touya stared at the tea cup and the manjuu on top of the plate that were handed to him. He was doubtful whether it was okay or not for him to eat human food, but the moment the fragrance of the tea tickled his nose, he felt sort of nostalgic. It was strange. Even though these

should have been unknown things to him, ever since he woke up, it was like he was starting to understand these human sensations little by little. Once he put the tea cup to his lips and drank some tea, he felt at ease.

“—Touya. Hurry and eat your manjuu. If you, as our guest, don’t eat first, we can’t eat either, and Natsuki is waiting with that face that looks like he could start drooling at any moment.”

He hadn’t noticed since he was calmly savoring his tea, but Natsuki who was sitting next to him was glancing between Touya and the manjuu.

“Natsuki, you’re being greedy.”

Even though Akio was chiding him, Natsuki’s eyes were pleading, *please hurry and eat them.*

“.....b-bon appetite.”

He didn’t care for sweets—but he had no time to hesitate. Since it was sad to make him wait, Touya hastily reached for a manjuu and brought it to his mouth. It was the new taro paste manjuu from the Nekomata Shrine. The outside was squishy while the golden paste on the inside was warm, soft and sweet.

—*Sweet?*

Even though the feeling of sweetness on his tongue surprised him, like the tea, he felt as though he knew the taste right away. One after another, these new sensations became his own strange personal experiences.

”Delicious.”

Touya muttered. Natsuki smiled widely as he replied.

“Right, aren’t they?”

“Kiri-sama, can I eat some too?”

“Go ahead. Eat”

Kiri replied before Natsuki and Akio brought the manjuus to their mouths.

“Aaahn.”

Since he was hungry too, he ate up the rest of his manjuu. Noticing that it probably wasn’t enough, Kiri handed his plate to him.

“You can have mine.”

“Are you sure?”

“It’s fine.”

“Kiri-sama, there’s still some left in the kitchen, shall I bring them out?”

Akio asked from beside him.

“No, it’s fine. You guys should eat the rest of those later.”

“Kaaay.”

Kiri answered to which Natsuki cheerfully replied. Touya thanked Kiri for giving him his portion, and ate it. Even after finishing two he felt like he could eat many more. He had a feeling an unknown door had been opened. He never thought sweets could be this delicious. It was strange, but eating these manjuu was somehow the first time he actually felt as though he had transformed into another being.

Kiri’s home was an elegantly structured Japanese mansion. Perhaps because it was an ayakashi home, it was overflowing with mystery all throughout. First of all, he was unable to grasp the complete layout of the house. Since the location of the rooms, kitchen and bath would change before he realized, it seemed difficult to construct a rough idea

of the layout. It was as if its structure was made of rooms and hallways that were appearing before he was even aware of it.

“That’s because the direction changes according to the day and hour, in case bad things try to get in.”

Akio explained. In other words, it was all sustained by Kiri’s spiritual energy.

“Since Kiri-sama has allowed you stay here, Touya-dono, I believe once you get used to it, you won’t get lost. If there is a trespasser, the room he steps into will lose all the hallways connected to it.”

“You mean they’ll be enclosed in that room? What happens to them after that?”

“I’m not sure. I suppose they wouldn’t be in there for eternity. The space with their remains would detach.”

Akio answered him indifferently even though it was an unsavory topic. On the other hand, Natsuki beside him chimed in with admiration.

“That’s Kiri-sama’s power. Isn’t it amazing?”

“Since you probably wouldn’t be able to relax in the guest room, let’s make a room for you, Touya.”

Kiri told him since he was allowing him to stay there. He didn't mean prepare an unoccupied room for him, but literally make a brand new room. Apparently the time when Touya woke up here was evening, so after everyone finished eating their manjuus, he was taken to the new room that had certainly been constructed for him. After some time had passed, the children had immediately called him for dinner. When he entered the spacious dining room there was an extravagant Japanese meal lined up in the center of the low table with a menu with of sushi and tempura. Natsuki and Akio carried out dish after dish, but when Touya said he would help and tried to go to the kitchen, he was stopped.

“Kudou-san is here today, so you can't.”

“Kudou-san?”

“Whenever it's too much for us to do, Kudou-san helps us out with the cleaning and cooking.”

He guessed Kudou-san was something like a “maid”. Of course a house this big would need someone like that.

”Kudou-san is shy. They hate being seen by people they're not accustomed to.”

“They’re human?”

Natsuki and Akio shook their heads no at the same time. Apparently they had been haunting a home in the human world with the name “Kudou” for a long time, so that was why this youkai maid—was called that. Even though they explained it to him, he was unsure how to reply. There had been one surprise after another ever since he woke up. Touya was starting to become increasingly numb to it all. No matter what happened, it wasn’t strange. Those few words pardoned everything. At any rate, if his cat self could turn human and become an *ayakashi cat*, anything was possible.

Just like the sweetness he felt with the manjuu, dinner was also nothing but delicious and mouth-watering. He wasn’t sure if he was quickly becoming accustomed to being satisfied by human food, or if it should have been natural for him since he had a human form, either way this was his reality, so he had no other choice but to accept it.

When it was time to clean up after their meal, Touya tried to carry some of the dishware, but as expected Natsuki and Akio stopped him.

“Kudou-san is here.”

When he thought about how he felt bad that they were taking care of everything for him, he tilted his head confused. This way of thinking

somehow seemed human-like.....he was surprised by how naturally it was coming to him.

After dinner was a bath. Even though being touched by water as a cat was terrible, as soon as he went into the bathroom, he wanted to wash away his sweat and went in without a fuss. On top of that, it felt incredibly good. He used both the soap and shampoo without hesitation to wash his body and hair, so he wondered if he had this knowledge because he had become an ayakashi with a human form.

When he got out of the bath and started to walk down the hall, he ran into Kiri. Touya confessed to him the things that made him even more confused.

“I took a bath with no problems.....”

Kiri looked at him blankly, then smiled amused.

“Of course. You’re different from before, you’re no longer a mere cat.”

He could say he had adapted to his amazement pretty quickly, and it was good that he had accepted various things as natural, but as usual, being unable to remember who he really was left him frustrated. Even though the scenery around him had become clear and vivid, only how he felt inside seemed to be hazy. Sensing his confusion, Kiri pet Touya’s damp head.

“—don’t get so worked up, it’ll be all right. You should rest for today.”

Kiri was a strange person, well, cat. He responded as if he could understand how he felt. Even though they had only met today, it was a mystery why he treated him so kindly. Was it because he was a cat with a charitable heart? He may have been lucky to have met Kiri and the others first when he came to the Country of Cats.

“Taking a bath felt nice, right? That’s good. If you went to the human world without taking on human patterns of behavior, everyone would think you were strange.”

Touya nodded and Kiri suddenly narrowed his eyes.

“Why don’t we all go in together next time? I made the bath big enough for several people to go in.”

He said *made* so matter of fact, but he didn’t mean build or anything, but arranged for it by using his spiritual energy. Touya figured soaking in a large bath with Natsuki and Akio would be fun, so he sincerely nodded.

“That would be nice.”

“Really? Well, how about just the two of us then?”

Going with the flow, he almost nodded yes, but Touya's brows suddenly knit. Even if his situation was completely incomprehensible, this was the one thing that felt uncomfortable to him.

“Um, Kiri.....now that I'm in this human form, being in the bath with just the two of us males seems kind of weird. You're the one who told me I shouldn't take any strange man's hand outside of here, right, Kiri? Even *I* get a somewhat suspicious vibe from that.....”

After Kiri fell quiet for a moment, he nodded.

“That's true. I made it to take a bath with Natsuki, Akio, and whoever else.you're a fast learner, Touya.”

The last part of his words sounded somewhat disappointed, so Touya tilted his head unsure if he had said something wrong.

“Oh, you're here, Touya-dono. The location of your room changed, so I'll take you there. You probably won't be able to figure it out on your own yet.”

Eventually Akio and Natsuki came to get him, so Touya and Kiri parted after saying goodnight to each other. When he followed those two, he saw what they had explained to him was true. The hallway and room locations had changed.

“It’s here.”

Even though he tried to remember the route from the bathroom to his room, its location had completely changed. It had been done on purpose with spiritual energy, but it was still a strange house.

“Thank you. Did something happen to make the room locations change?”

“For security reasons they change periodically.but, tonight is probably a precautionary move since you’re here, Touya-dono. No matter how much the mansion changes inside, we’ll have rooms next to each other.”

After Akio’s explanation, Natsuki smiled widely at Touya.

“You don’t need to worry, it’ll be all right. Kiri-sama will protect us. If you have to use the bathroom in the middle of the night, just call on us. So if the location changes, we can show you the way.”

“Well then, good night.”

When the two of them started to leave, Touya stopped them by calling out.

“Wait a moment.”

“Um.....if it’s all right, could I take some of your time? There are so many things I don’t understand, so I’d like to talk with you two. If possible, in my room.”

“With us?”

The two of them asked in unison.

“What should we do?”

They asked turning to each other, then nodded at the same time.

“All right.”

“Well then.”

Touya opened the sliding door and entered the room holding their hands.

The new room Kiri had arranged for him was like a room in a refined ryokan. Once Touya sat on the cushions at the low table, Natsuki and Akio sat across from him, and stared.

“What did you want to talk about?”

Akio was the first to speak.

“There are a lot of things I don’t know, so I don’t think I can sleep. Why don’t you two tell me about yourselves first? Are you two brothers?”

Natsuki and Akio faced each other again, and shook their heads at the same time.

“No, we were just both taken in by Kiri-sama at the same time.”

“We’re not blood related, but we’re always together.”

Akio’s answer was composed, and Natsuki’s was childish as usual.

“Really? Then.....what was it like when you two become *ayakashi cats*? Was it like me, where you didn’t have any memory of your past, and nothing made sense?”

“__”

Akio got quiet and made an uncertain expression. Natsuki replied first.

“I don’t remember.”

“Huh? You don’t remember? But.....”

“Yeah. At all. Once we came to, Akio and I were already in Kiri-sama’s house. Right~?”

If they weren’t able to remember, wouldn’t they have gone back to being regular cats? Did these children *just* come to the Country of Cats like him?

“How long ago did you two start living here?”

“Hmmm, how many years has it been? At least ten years have gone by.”

“Twenty-one years.”

Akio answered precisely. Even though it had been twenty-one years, they both didn’t look any older than a human first or second grader. That must have meant they had become ayakashi when they were kittens, and time stopped for them at that age.

“You know...”

Natsuki started to speak to the shocked Touya.

“Our bodies don’t age the same way humans do. Like how Kiri-sama is.....”

“Idiot, Natsuki. Talking about his age is forbidden.”

Akio frantically covered the blabbering Natsuki’s mouth.

“Why?”

“It would be unfortunate if Touya-dono becomes frightened. Kiri-sama will tell him anything necessary.”

“But Touya-dono wants to talk to us.”

When he watched the two of them argue Touya felt conflicted. Every time these children began to speak then stop because they weren’t allowed to talk about it, his restless doubts about who or what Kiri was expanded. However, since the two of them were unable to say anything bad about the master they respected, they frantically interjected that he should ask Kiri-sama about his age.

“By the way, I meant to say this earlier, but could you stop calling me *Touya-dono*. You can just call me Touya.”

“.....”

Natsuki and Akio turned to each other as if they had come to a decision.

“But, you’re Kiri-sama’s.....well, you’re his guest.”

“I want to call you Touya. It feels like we’re getting along better that way. We can call you Touya?”

“It’s fine.”

“Yaaay, Touya”

Natsuki immediately cried, but Akio lowered his eyes and seemed to have a difficult time saying it.

“If that’s what you want.....”

He was a level-headed child, but shy. Nevertheless, even though these two have been here for twenty-one years, and should clearly be older than Touya, he couldn’t think of them as anything else but children.

“Even though you can’t remember your past, how are you two still here as *ayakashi* cats? Didn’t Kiri tell me that if I couldn’t remember my previous self, eventually I’ll go back to being a regular cat?”

“Kiri-sama said that, didn’t he? I wonder why.”

Akio glanced at Natsuki who had his head tilted, and sighed.

“.....we remembered once. That’s why we were successfully reborn as *ayakashi* cats. Afterwards, we forgot again.”

“There’s cases like that too?”

“Rarely.”

Akio answered. Natsuki continued to look puzzled. The two of them didn’t seem to really understand it either. He wondered if they felt any doubts about that. Touya couldn’t remember wanting to become a youkai cat to begin with. However, he was also afraid of the possibility of turning back into a normal cat after gaining this temporary human form. If he were still a normal cat, he definitely wouldn’t have to worry about all that.

“.....I see. You two are special cases. Thanks. I’ll ask Kiri for more details about my situation again.”

After Akio apologized for not being more helpful, he turned his concerned gaze toward him.

“What is it?”

“Touya-dono.....I mean, Touya, you aren’t afraid of Kiri-sama, right? You let Kiri-sama touch you, you were able to speak to him without

being frightened, and you became pretty intimate with him during the short time we were out shopping. On top of that, you're talking pretty smoothly now even though a few hours ago all you could say was *meow*."

Natsuki nodded in agreement.

"Right, even though Touya's meows were cute."

Having it pointed out by these two who looked so young embarrassed Touya. However, what they said was true. He just didn't know how to use his voice at first.

"It's not like that with everyone? Kiri told me I was a fast learner."

"Of course once you're used to it, you'll be able to speak right away, but.....sometimes there are those who are unable to after a few days. However, that wasn't the case for you, Touya."

"I see.....but, I still want to meow when I'm surprised or something."

"We do the same, even though we've been ayakashi for twenty-one years."

Akio replied with a serious face. It seemed like a trait that wasn't so

easily removed. Nevertheless—his doubts resurfaced at Akio's words. He wondered why everyone was so concerned about whether Kiri was *scary* or *not scary*.

“Is Kiri scary? I don't feel afraid of him since I'm thankful that he brought me into his home when I passed out.”

Natsuki shook his head vigorously.

“Kiri-sama isn't scary. We were also taken in by him, and he watches over us. *Scary* isn't a fitting description, is it, Akio?”

Akio nodded honestly when he was brought into it.

“That's right. My choice of words were poor. Even though having it pointed out by *you* is humiliating, you're right. It's because Kiri-sama has an immensely powerful spiritual energy. More than a youma, I guess you could say he is a divine beast, or maybe just a very large cat, either way, he has quite the reputation.”

Seeing him use his spiritual energy to make the construction of the house, he could now understand their explanation of how *scary* meant having immense power. Since they were speaking with vague and cautious words, it made him think Kiri's true form was that of a terrifying youkai. Something like a creature with three or four eyes with

numerous horns or teeth—.

“I see.....so that’s what you mean by *scary*.”

Even though he still didn’t think he could judge whether he was a youkai or a cat by his appearance, he couldn’t deny that he was relieved.

“Due to that, there are a lot of ayakashi that keep their distance, and tremble in fear around Kiri-sama. Even though Kudou-san had been exorcised by Kiri-sama, they were so captivated by that strength that they became his servant.”

He was told the reason he was unable to go near the kitchen was because Kudou-san was shy, but it seemed as though even their youkai maid had their own complex circumstances.

“Wait. Kudou-san was a youkai Kiri expelled?”

“Yes. Kiri-sama does that sort of work in the human world. Kudou-san had been haunting a home named Kudou for many years, but too much spiritual energy was gathering there, and accidents happened, so he was consulted by the home owner.....”

“Youkai can perform exorcisms on other youkai?”

From what he was saying, it sounded like Kiri had expelled Kudou-san who was causing trouble for that home.

“That’s right. Kiri-sama is really strong. He is often consulted when there are youkai doing bad things in the human world. That’s why there are ayakashi that are really afraid of him.”

Did that mean Kiri frequently went back and forth to the human world? On top of that, even though he couldn’t grasp the distance between the human world and the Country of Cats, if it was close enough for Kiri to give consultations, so he must have had some close relationships with humans. From what they were telling him, didn’t that mean the world of ayakashi was connected to the human world in several different places?

“Sometimes we help with his work too.”

“Huh?”

Touya opened his eyes wide.

“You guys go to the human world too?”

“Of course.”

They both said as they nodded in unison.

“In that cat-eared form?”

“No. We transform into either cat or human forms.”

From what Natsuki said, it seemed as though the both of them could change their forms at will. Touya became a little jealous.

“I see.....why do you two keep your human form with cat ears and tail while you’re in the Country of Cats?”

“This world is full of spiritual energy, so it’s easier to be in the form that comes most natural. Our power isn’t all that strong yet. Besides.....”

Akio cut off his words part of the way, and turned his face toward Natsuki. Natsuki took over with a wide smile.

“Kiri-sama said, we looked cutest in this form, so we did as he said.”

Akio coughed in embarrassment. It seemed as though they were meeting their master’s preferences. Natsuki and Akio may have been fine with that, but Touya was troubled.

“How do you get rid of your cat ears and tail to look like humans? I’d like to go to the human world right away too.”

“Since you’re a fast learner, Touya, there’s no need to hurry. You’ll definitely be able to transform soon. Besides, you’ve only been here for one day, right?”

“That’s true.....but.....”

Not knowing what he *really* was made him uneasy. However, it seemed like Kiri knew how to go to the human world. Natsuki and Akio could come and go as they pleased too, so eventually he could ask them about it. Besides, it was pointless even talking about if he wasn’t able to hide his cat ears and tail first.

“If there’s a trick to it, could you teach me? Is there a way to withdraw these ears and tail?”

“It’s rather difficult even for us to change into our human forms since it requires so much energy, but...”

“If it’s our cat forms, that’s easy.”

Natsuki raised his hand enthusiastically.

“How do you do it?”

“How—? We just turn into cats. Like this.....”

Natsuki’s eyes glowed with a golden light—he thought, but the next moment his form disappeared. In replacement, he heard a *mew*. Where Natsuki should have been was an orange-striped cat—sitting on top of the cushion.

“Wah, wah!”

Touya was surprised by his magnificent transformation. The kitten let out a cheerful *mew* as he jumped up on the low table and trotted across it to jump onto Touya’s chest. “Natsuki? Is that really you, Natsuki?”

The kitten had been meowing to begin with, but as Touya held him in his arms and pet his head, he answered him.

“That’s right~”

“I was able to transform successfully, right? I’m amazing, right?”

“Yes, it was amazing.”

He genuinely praised him. The kitten—Natsuki, jumped onto Touya’s shoulder and sweetly rubbed against his nose. Suddenly feeling like a cat, Touya also rubbed against the tip of Natsuki’s nose.

“Natsuki, that tickles.”

His shoulders shook with laughter as Natsuki licked his face. That’s when he noticed Akio sitting across from him, looking at him with a tense expression.

“What about you, Akio? Can you change into a cat too?”

Akio nodded without a word. After a while, Akio’s lowered eyes started to glow with a golden light like Natsuki’s had earlier. In the next moment, a gray striped cat appeared. Unlike Natsuki, he didn’t meow, he just jumped onto the low table, sat down and looked up at him.

“I turned into a cat.”

“Come over here.”

He thought Akio may not like being touched like Natsuki, but when he reached out his hand, he looked at it hesitantly, then timidly approached it.



He jumped on this lap and obediently curled up there as Touya pet his head. The warmth of the kittens calmed even his frantic anxiety from earlier about being unable to transform in a hurry. Feeling the warmth of these two, he was now able to relax in this human form. He adored Natsuki's cheerfulness, and Akio's reserved sweetness. It seemed to awaken Touya's motherly instincts even though he was male. When he really thought about it though, Natsuki and Akio were twenty-one years his senior in the Country of Cats.

“.....by the way, I'm nervous sleeping alone tonight, so could we all sleep here together?”

The kittens turned to each other wondering what they should do, the way same way they did as cat-eared humans, then nodded at the same time. He laid out the futon before slipping inside. Natsuki and Akio eventually crawled in as well, on top of Touya's chest.

“Touya is so warm. Kiri-sama is really big and warm too.”

Natsuki nuzzled his face with a *mew*.

“You sleep with Kiri too?”

“We haven't in while, but a long time ago we would sleep together all the time. Kiri-sama's fur is really pretty, and feels so nice. We'd lay on

top of his shoulders.”

“Hmmm.....”

“That’s because Kiri-sama is so big.....”

The pleasant image of Natsuki and Akio sleeping together with Kiri floated into his mind. Touya’s expression reflexively softened.

“How big is he?”

“.....”

When he specifically brought up something about Kiri’s true form, the two of them faced each other in their usual way and got quiet. However, he already knew what sort of frightening youkai he was, and wasn’t afraid. Since Natsuki and Akio were so attached to him, there was no way he could be a bad youkai. Besides, it appeared as though he was called upon in the human world to exorcise bad youkai..... Even though he was shocked by these cat-eared boys when he first woke up, he now felt grateful that Natsuki and Akio were there with him. The pleasant feeling of their fur, their warmth, all felt so nostalgic and intimate to him.

Just what am I—?

That doubt no longer plagued his mind as Touya felt Natsuki and Akio's gentle body heat. Feeling as if he had gone back to being a black cat, he soon fell into a comforting sleep.